

Mayor Tim Kelly's Remarks in Response to the May 28, 2022, Shooting in Chattanooga, Tenn.

As prepared for the press briefing held at 4:30 PM ET on May 29, 2022

Good afternoon, thank you for being here.

This afternoon, I have to admit that I'm experiencing a wide range of emotions.

First, I am heartbroken for the families and the victims whose lives were upended last night by gunfire. No parent should ever have to get that call. So, as a community, right now there's a lot of hurt and grieving, and I just want to let those families know that I, and Ginny, and your city grieve with you.

But I am also angry. Six teenagers were shot last night in what we believe was an altercation between other teenagers. And once again, I'm standing here in front of you talking about our community's youth getting shot. That's outrageous and it has to stop.

It's ridiculous that I even need to publicly state that guns have no place in the hands of our kids. And that children shouldn't be wandering around in the middle of the night with no supervision.

Let me also say that I am deeply grateful to the outstanding professionals at the Chattanooga Police Department, who acted quickly and decisively to save lives and prevent any more bloodshed. These officers are heroes and we're fortunate that they were able to respond as quickly as they did. But the job of preventing kids from shooting each other cannot fall to the brave men and women of our police department alone.

Here's the bottom line: teenagers acting out, pushing the boundaries, and getting into trouble isn't new. Kids have always gotten into scuffles with each other. That's a tale that's as old as time. What is new is now they have access to handguns and firearms that leave behind bodies instead of bruised egos. I can't say this clearly enough: easy access to illegal guns is killing kids and our community has a responsibility to put a stop to it.

This is exactly why I joined mayors from across the country last week to call on the United States Senate to pass common sense reforms to our gun safety laws. Background checks, red flag laws, raising the age limit so that children can't purchase assault rifles—these are things that the vast majority of Americans support, as do our law enforcement professionals. There's no reason to wait, we need to pass these laws now.

But parents also need to be responsible. If you know your kid has access to a firearm, you **must** intervene before someone—perhaps even your own child—ends up dead. The kind of gun violence that erupted last night is often rooted in neglect. All of us—and especially parents, caregivers, and families—must be actively involved in knowing where our children are, what they are doing, and ensuring they don't get their hands on weapons that can harm themselves and others. If you have a firearm, keep it securely locked and away from children. As gun thefts

are on the rise, failing to secure your gun can result in a tragedy. It will take our families AND our community working together to stop this.

To that end, I want to thank our City Council Chairman Darrin Ledford, Vice-Chairwoman Raquetta Dotley, and Councilwoman Demetrus Coonrod for being here today and for their ongoing partnership. Our alignment is critical and I'm grateful for their leadership. Over the next several weeks, I'll be working with our City Council to create spaces for our community's youth to safely gather, and also to invest in youth mentorship and violence prevention programs with our American Rescue Plan dollars. ***And I encourage all Chattanoogaans to get involved in a child's life through a mentorship program.*** Nothing will make a bigger difference in our community than that.

Finally, again: if you know a child—especially *your* child—has access to a firearm, you have a moral duty to intervene or call the police. And parents, make sure you know where your kids are spending their time at night. These are common sense things that we can do that keep children safe, which is what we adults are supposed to—and obliged—to do. ***As a parent, you are civilly and criminally liable for the violent acts of your child that you could've stopped.*** I am directing my office to work with the police department and the district attorney to enforce existing laws that hold parents accountable for knowingly providing or allowing children access to guns that result in violence.

I know that there is no one strategy or policy that will solve this crisis. And there's nothing I can say behind this podium that will undo last night's violence. But this afternoon, I am calling on our entire community to come together as part of the solution.

Thank you.